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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a framework for developing an approach to understanding soap opera's appeal as a direct function of both the genre's form and of its fans' viewing behavior. The paper suggests that while this analysis is largely critical, other studies from both critical and social scientific approaches can be based upon the framework and assumptions developed here. The paper is divided into the following sections: (1) a relational approach to understanding television viewing; (2) the dramatic serial gratification process; (3) the cumulative function of the gratification process; and (4) the further impact of time upon the viewing relationship. It is concluded that continued critical analysis of the generic structure of the serials is needed to detail more completely and accurately the soap opera events that provide continuous gratification to serial viewers. One table of data is included and 24 notes are attached. (MG)

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THE APPEAL OF SOAP OPERA

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"Ah, behold the unreeling of the real reality of practically everything: our dreams, our idiocies and raptures, our nativity, passion and death."

-- James Broughton[1]

INTRODUCTION

Television is clearly the most pervasive of the American mass media, and the dramatic serial, or "soap opera," has become one of the most pervasive genres on American television. Now a popular alternative on both daytime and prime time television, "soaps" are followed on pay and cable TV services as well. In fact, in many markets it is not unusual to find an evening soap opera taking first place in the "ratings race," and most of the daytime serials demonstrate a remarkable durability for so precarious a medium as television.[2] Furthermore, with roots that can be traced back at least as far as nineteenth century serialized novels and magazine stories, the popularity of this particular art form has endured as it has evolved from print to film, from film to radio and, ultimately, from radio to network television in 1950.[3]

The dramatic serial, in one form or another, has indeed been with us for a long time. Yet what is it about this particular genre that makes it so appealing to so many people? Popular culture scholars have only recently broached this question,[4] and the results of their investigations are, in many ways, less than

satisfying. Much of the research on dramatic serials has focused on quantifiable content attributes, such as the illnesses common to serial plots[5] or soap characters' alcohol and drug use.[6] What continues to most set the soap opera apart from other popular television genres, however, is the intense and lasting loyalty of its fans. Anecdotes about such literal "fanatacism" abound. For example, soap actors often report receiving birthday cards on their characters' "birthdays," students often "skip class" to watch an important episode, and a number of urban bars now host such "events" as Dynasty parties, complete with complimentary champagne and large screen televisions.[7] In fact, Edward Whetmore has observed that "there is no other single TV genre that seems to move its audience so completely, nor to draw them in so frequently. From an audience perspective, that makes soap operas the most intriguing and important programs in all of television programming."[8] A number of researchers have conducted studies aimed at directly ascertaining what appeal the soaps hold for their viewers.[9] But again, the results of their efforts are of dubious value. What have most often emerged from these analyses are interesting but not very explanatory uses and gratifications typologies and hierarchies.

From a carefully construed factor-analytic study of the gratifications identified by viewers of All My Children, for example, Ronald Compesi can do little more than confirm that,

indeed, viewers watch primarily for "entertainment."[10] Compesi also rank orders a number of other factors, including "habit," "convenience," "social utility" and so on. Such results are, of course, valuable. But knowing that people use the soaps as entertainment or for the facilitation of social interaction says nothing in particular about the soaps themselves. Similar typologies have been constructed for other television genres, and for other media. Such results only continue to beg the question: What is unique about television in general and television genres in particular?[11] Also, traditional uses and gratifications research fails to adequately reveal how and why viewers initially become involved with a series and then continue to watch over extensive time periods during their life span. Yet, understanding the dynamics of this appeal is crucial to understanding the soap opera as a unique content area of television.

Our own understanding of this phenomenon began with an analysis of audio tapes and transcripts collected in an exploratory study of the soap opera audience.[12] Then, we attempted to couple that interview data with a critical analysis of the genre itself. We feel that a specific and explanatory pattern exists regarding the "gratification process" involved in soap opera viewing. The framework presented here develops an approach for understanding this serial appeal as a direct function of both the genre's form and of its fans' viewing behavior. We base this framework upon a slightly different means for

understanding involvement with television in general as a dynamic, developing "relationship."

A RELATIONAL APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING TELEVISION VIEWING

The relationship that develops between the televiewer (or television user) and the television content she or he is processing involves aspects somewhat similar to relationships that develop between persons. That is, each situation shares certain features common to any relational pairing. In fact, the television user -- television relationship is formed for many of the same reasons and even involves certain similar behavior patterns as those found in interpersonal relationships. For example, consider the fact that relationships are modified as the individuals involved gain information about each other, "moving from some degree of generality or superficiality to some degree of uniqueness or depth."[13] This observation is also useful for describing how TV viewers approach their medium. As an individual viewer continues to watch a particular series over time, his or her relationship to the program changes, often moving in the direction of greater depth involvement. Because the television user -- television relationship is thus generally altered, it must also change in terms of its particular aspects. Therefore, it seems that the "uses and gratifications" involved in watching a series will also change as the viewer's relationship to the series evolves.

To extend this point further, it also appears that interpersonal relationships, regardless of type, represent a mutual

agreement, implicit or explicit, between people to interact in order to maximize rewards."[14] A similar contract is certainly implied in viewer-program pairings. Viewers usually agree to watch as long as there is some reward or gratification for doing so. Consequently, relational change in viewer-program pairings appears to be commensurate with the maximization of such viewer rewards. It is this processual component that is ignored by most uses and gratifications researchers.

In light of such processes, the fact that serial dramas are outstanding in their ability to garner large, loyal audiences and maintain them over lengthy time periods is worth further attention. Uniquely, this ability seems to derive from the genre's capacity to exploit the potential for escalating the televiewer-television relationship (increasing viewer involvement and devotion) by maximizing both the quantity and quality of gratifications over time. Directed exploration of the precise nature of this process lies at the center of understanding the appeal of soap opera.

THE DRAMATIC SERIAL GRATIFICATION PROCESS

Soap opera viewers apparently receive gratifications that are based on the anticipated or unexpected completion of a sequence, subplot or plot in a serial.[15] These particular serial gratifications are distinguishable from extra-programmatic viewing motivation variables. That is, they coincide directly with

events in the program text, having as much to do with how the genre is constructed as with the psychological needs and dispositions of individual viewers.[16] Basically, these discrete gratification units (or events) can be classified temporally and grouped into three general categories: (1) immediate, (2) short-term, and (3) long-term.

The classification of these "emotional payoffs" involves the interplay of two central factors. The first is the time span between the point at which a gratification event is begun and the point at which it is resolved. In dramatic serial viewing, this measure essentially corresponds to the time a viewer spends in watching a serial in order to arrive at a particular plot line or sequence resolution, an anticipated event, or a surprise occurrence.

Intrinsically related to the time spent viewing is the amount of information a viewer maintains concerning a particular serial. This measure varies with the sophistication and completeness with which the viewer understands the characters, character relationships, and plot and subplot interrelationships in the serial. Generally, this "archived" information increases as viewing time accumulates, and it is supplemented by discussion with other viewers and often by reading soap opera columns and magazines. Indeed, a viewer watching a soap episode for the first time is often left somewhat bewildered. For while the actions in progress are comprehensible enough, the background information essential to a fuller understanding of the story progression comes only with continued viewing over time. Moreover, regular

viewers do seem to become master archivists of the events and occurrences that form a favored serial. Of course, this archival function itself is a behavior that is essential in order to escalate the viewing relationship (and consequently maximize the overall gratification derived from viewing) as it directly increases and facilitates the viewer's content comprehension. It is little wonder, then, that viewers have become so adept at storing soap opera "trivia." This particular form of "trivial pursuits" has not been lost on the networks. Regular contests are held in which fans can immerse themselves in "daytime dilemmas" and win money for guessing what well-known characters will do. Likewise, ads in publications like TV Guide entice the viewer with bold-face questions reminiscent of 1950's movie trailers: "Can Bo and Hope stop a masquerade murder?" or "Kelly is pursued by two men: One wants to love her. One wants to kill her! Who will get to her first?" Of course, long-time fans delight in their ability to accurately predict such plot outcomes. Keeping in mind the overall relational nature of television viewing, it is important to note that the serial genre itself aids viewers in developing and maintaining a high level of content comprehension. The forward movement of any soap opera will inevitably include flashbacks, verbal recall of characters and events, plot repitition, and various other mnemonic constructs. Some more specific examples and further elaboration detail the distinctions among the three soap opera gratification events (see Table 1).

Insert table 1 about here

Immediate Gratification Events

Immediate gratification events (or immediate "payoffs") do not depend upon an understanding of previous plotlines or character backgrounds and are often characterized by the completion of a single event or action in the serial plot. Common immediate gratifications include scenes of intimacy or violence. These immediate gratifications seem to be the type that new viewers describe most often in responding to questions about why they watch particular serials. These gratifications occur almost randomly and are often initially encountered by chance. For example, a viewer may tune in to Dynasty (ABC, 1981-..) and find that a scene featuring the scantily clad character of Steven Carrington is sexually appealing. Here, the gratification involved in viewing Steve in a scene is immediate and depends upon no understanding of who he is or how he fits into the more complex web of story and character developments in that soap opera. Likewise, program promotional spots ("promos") for soaps often include heavily sexual and/or confrontational imagery in addition to plot line teasers, thus appealing both to established fans and potential new viewers. Immediate gratification events, then, seem to first draw the viewer in and initiate the viewer --- serial

relationship; these events are often the first step in the process by which viewers become hooked on a particular soap opera.

Short Term Gratification Events

Short-term gratification events are found in the mini-climax of a single subplot or event series, requiring that a viewer watch at least from the beginning of a story line to its completion. This seems to occur within a week or two for daytime soaps and within one or two episodes during evening serials. Such subplots and their accompanying mini-climaxes are continually set in motion in dramatic serials; they are a key element in the genre's structure. Examples could include the playing out of events surrounding a family reunion or the development of a new romance. Generally, these subplot resolutions do not involve termination of the story line but, rather, a permutation of its direction and substance. Indeed, this continual process of permutating the characters and story lines is one of the soap opera's central generic characteristics. Viewers who spend a relatively moderate amount of time viewing a serial most often receive short-term gratifications, in addition to immediate ones. Thus, as their understanding of the soap opera increases, their enjoyment of it also intensifies.

Long-term Gratification Events

Long-term gratification events are generally the privilege of loyal fans of a serial. Such gratifications, in fact, seem to be the cherished rewards of the devoted viewer who most fully

understands the soap's characters and plot histories. These rewarding experiences (gratification events), both as anticipated and as received, are described by viewers as qualitatively more intense than the two previous gratification types discussed. Examples of these gratification events include the long-awaited reunion of Luke and Laura Spencer of General Hospital (ABC, 1963 -), the shooting of J. R. and the unique return of Bobby Ewing of Dallas (CBS, 1978 -). Each culminated a series of events and character histories that had been evolving over a relatively extensive period of both real and program time. These gratification events are as close as the soap genre comes to approximating the traditional climax in literature and film. Clearly, the meaning and appreciation of these events is most complete for those viewers who bring to them a greater understanding of the serial's form and content.

These three distinct types of gratification events comprise the basis of the dramatic serial gratification process. In effect, they create three sequential gratification levels, or types of experiences or rewards that accompany viewing. The three types of experiences are hierarchical and integrative, with fixed ordinal positions (see Table 1), and the level at which a viewer finds him or herself will change over time. The nature of this change seems to be highly significant in understanding the superior allure of the genre; ultimately, it is this change that escalates the viewer --- serial relationship.

THE CUMULATIVE FUNCTION OF THE GRATIFICATION PROCESS

Initially, a new viewer may watch a soap episode while randomly encountering or purposively seeking immediate gratification events (e.g., the depiction of sexual intimacy). In fact, whenever outside information about the serial is not available (as from a neighbor or digest), these are the only gratification events the novice viewer is likely to appreciate at all. The importance of such immediate gratifications cannot be underestimated. Again, it is this gratification type that often attracts the viewer to a serial for the first time and it also provides continuous gratification to viewers at all gratification levels. Furthermore, once viewers come to perceive a program as an effective source of such experiences, the probability of continued use consequently increases. This continued viewing will, in turn, move the viewer along to the second and third gratification levels.

Thus, the escalation of the viewer --- serial relationship proceeds as follows. Program content offers viewers immediate gratification events that encourage those viewers to attend to the program. With such attention comes increased content comprehension and viewing time investment. Consequently, continued attention and increased viewing hours allow for the eventual appreciation of short- and long-term gratification events that, again, encourage greater involvement with the serial. More simply stated, the process of viewing over time increases overall gratification and increased

gratification encourages viewing over time. And so it goes.

One of the most interesting and perhaps most important aspects of this dramatic serial gratification process is that it is indeed cumulative, both in terms of the individual gratification events and in how they can be or are received. Viewers who reach the third gratification level receive not only the largest number of gratifying experiences and the greatest variety of gratification types, but also the largest number of gratification combinations. That is, individual serial events may variously combine the elements of immediate, short- and long-term gratifications, permitting compound gratification events to be experienced by viewers (see Table 1). Additionally, these compounds can simultaneously gratify audience members who vary, even if greatly, in the relationship they have developed with their program (i.e., who are at different gratification levels). For example, some viewers of the prime time soap opera Dynasty (ABC, 1981-89) often recall one of the quite physical "fist fights" between archrivals Alexis Carrington-Colby and Krystle Carrington as exciting and memorable. Individually, however, these viewers described this gratification event differently depending upon their own viewing histories. For Level One viewers (see Table 1), gratification was described in terms of the action of the scene (the two women being physically aggressive). Viewers at Level Two were entertained by the robust fighting, but also described what had caused the confrontation as an element in their

overall satisfaction with the event (Alexis had arranged for an "accident" that brought about Krystle's miscarriage). These viewers appreciated and could ascribe meaning to both the action within and the interaction surrounding the event. Finally, Level Three viewers recounted the same qualities of the gratification event as did other viewers, but found the scene an even more meaningful and intense occurrence. For them, the event was a culminating experience upon which the entire bitter and intertwined histories of the two characters could be brought to bear in a sort of viewing gestalt in which the whole indeed became greater than the sum of its parts. Perception was both synchronic and diachronic, involving an awareness of past narrative and character relationships and a prediction of future ones. Not unexpectedly, Level Three viewers are the most consistent in their viewing of favored soaps; they appear to be, afterall, the most gratified.

Another way to view this complex process of increasing viewer involvement is to use Thayer's simple "attention formula":[17]

$$\text{Likelihood (or extent) of attention} = \frac{\text{Expected payoff}}{\text{Anticipated effort}}$$

Thayer notes that, on the basis of this formula, "We would expect one's likelihood (or extent) of attention to vary as the ratio of what he anticipates his payoff for doing so -- to the effort he anticipates will be required by him to attend and comprehend."[18]

The likelihood and extent of involvement with dramatic serials increases over time through an almost simultaneous reduction in effort and increase in "payoffs" or gratifications. For new viewers, soaps operas clearly require some effort to delve into and attempt to understand the complexities of the serial's narrative.[19] However, immediate gratifications and a piqued curiosity (anticipated gratifications) help to maintain viewer attention. Further viewing reduces the effort necessary to follow the movement of the serial. Additionally, the quantity and quality of gratifications increases. For many fans the "expected payoffs" eventually become so great that added effort (e.g., increasing viewing time, missing an appointment or other TV program, video taping of serial episodes, [20] etc.) does not reduce the regularity and intensity involved in viewing their soaps.

It is precisely this cumulative gratification progression that seems to best explain why individual viewers feel that their favorite soap operas just get better all the time. It is not remarkable, then, that soap opera fans often mention that one of the primary reasons they continue watching a given soap is "because I've been watching it for so long" or "because I've been watching it for years." So, do fans watch a favored serial for many years because it is their favorite, or is it their favorite because they have watched it for many years? [21]

THE FURTHER IMPACT OF TIME UPON THE VIEWING RELATIONSHIP

It is very likely, of course, that both serial content and viewing longevity combine in helping to determine a fan's preference for a soap opera. Indeed, these two factors are inseparable. As pointed out here, the quality of serial gratifications is determined, at least in part, both by a viewer's content comprehension and by the span of time over which the individual story lines and events are stretched. But, there are additional, more general factors that can impact upon the viewing relationship.

When examined collectively, serial gratification events can be viewed as forming an overall, highly important "gratification rhythm" within the soap opera formula. For while exact periodicities do not exist, it does seem that serial programs provide gratification events that viewer perception and behavior may incorporate. For example, daytime soap fans often expect to view a relatively surprising event sequence begun in Friday's episode, accompanied by unanswered questions to be pondered and debated with other fans until the next week of programming. Additionally, these viewers are also accustomed to periodic lulls in their soap's dramatic progression, and often feel more secure in missing an episode or two at such times.

It seems, then, that the temporal dimensions of the viewer-program relationship merit further investigation. In addition to

knowing, for example, how long it takes for gratification events to occur, it is also important to consider when they are or were experienced by the viewer. Increasingly, this particular interplay between gratifications sought (future) and gratifications obtained (present and past) is being investigated by researchers.[22] Such research may be particularly important when applied to examinations of dramatic serials, whose whole success seems to rest mainly upon their unique construction and ordering of gratification events. Clearly, further study is called for in detailing the impact of past gratification received upon the perception and enjoyment of gratification in the present. For indeed, these considerations form for the viewer, both explicitly and implicitly, the contractual (i.e., expected, agreed upon) elements necessary to maintain the viewing relationship.

Finally, the concept of "anticipation" itself needs to be separately evaluated, as it is so fundamental an aspect of the soap opera viewing experience. Anticipatory gratification refers to both some type of gratification that is expected and to the gratification of expectation itself. At any given time in a viewer's relationship with a program, he or she will hold a set of expectations about the gratifications to be derived from viewing. Furthermore, serial viewers anticipate plot line occurrences and soap opera writers will generally leave alternate plot outcomes open to speculation. For example, the death of the main character in

All My Children (Jenny Nelson) did not end the character's impact within the serial. Rather, her demise was really a terminus a quo (as is most often the case) used to generate new speculative anticipation: Does Jenny have a look-alike sister? Has her ghost returned? Is her widowed husband going insane or is he really seeing her? Ultimately, because fans find such great delight in anticipating the eventual answers to such questions (as previously noted, speculation is often the central feature of discussion in all types of soap "gossip"), the experience of anticipation itself is an important gratification source. Thus, the soap opera viewing experience is one in which the future becomes as important as the present and where each duration is colored by the events of the past in both program and real time.

CONCLUSION

The analysis presented here has provided a conceptual framework for understanding more fully the immense appeal of the television soap opera. These serials consist of three levels of program-based gratification types that facilitate the maintenance and escalation of the viewer-program relationship. It has been suggested that the time-related dimensions of such gratifications are central, yet understudied elements of the viewing process. The impact of time upon gratifications can directly affect perceived quality. Such considerations have special significance for

study of the dramatic serial, whose generic structure builds upon a pattern in which present events are constantly linked to the serial's past. Furthermore, the extensive length of time over which fans watch soap operas is also unique, and an aspect of viewing behavior that again increases the need for attention to temporal considerations.

It is essential that media researchers account for such qualitative and processual factors operating within and outside of the content under study. Indeed, as Chaffee has observed, "Most theories about communication involve some sort of process, but often our data are inappropriate to studying process."[23] This has been particularly true of uses and gratifications studies; the gratification units reported, be they program-based gratification events or more general listings of psychological satisfactions, have not been grounded in time-bound contexts. As one attempt to begin to remedy this situation, the analysis presented here provides gratification units placed within an active and relational field.

While this analysis has been largely critical, other studies from both critical and social scientific approaches can be based upon the framework and assumptions developed here. Continued critical analysis of the generic structure of the serials is needed to detail more completely and accurately the soap opera events that provide continuous gratification, in qualitatively different

ways, to serial viewers. Process-oriented empirical research is needed to shed greater light upon the dynamics of viewer-program relationship escalation and deescalation in televiewing, to establish more detailed transition rules for gratification level advancement, for the further development of temporal gratification descriptors and measurements, and for the continued analysis of the varied factors that impact upon a viewer's unique perception of mediated gratification.

We live at a time when more Americans have televisions than refrigerators or indoor plumbing.[24] There is a strong need to understand the potent, significant, and proactive events involved in the experience of televiewing. Because it attracts and holds an audience like no other genre, the television soap opera remains an obvious area of focus for the continued pursuit of that understanding.

AUTHOR NOTES

Alfred P. Kielwasser (M.A., San Francisco State University) has taught at the University of San Francisco and San Francisco State University. His research interests are currently focused upon the psychological (particularly, the social-cognitive) aspects of mediated communication. He is also working on the development of naturalistic methods of inquiry into mediated communication and the building of existential-phenomenological communication theory. **Michelle A. Wolf** (Ph.D., University of Texas at Austin) is Associate Professor of Broadcast Communication Arts at San Francisco State University. Her current research involves the intrapersonal uses of popular music and the application of non-traditional (particularly phenomenologically-based) research methods for studying mediated communication usage in natural environments. In their latest book, **Michelle Wolf** and **Al Kielwasser** have compiled a collection of original essays and research reports in which communications scholars address important issues concerning human sexuality. This book, Human Sexuality and Mass Media: Influences on Straight and Gay People and Their Relationships, will be published by The Haworth Press/Harrington Park (New York, NY). **(Tentative title)**

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NOTES

1. James Broughton, Seeing the Light (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1977), p. 20.

2. The season-to-date ratings for prime-time programs (Nielsen), Sept. 22 to Feb. 5 (weeks 1 - 19), place Dallas in 10th position with a 35 share, and Falcon Crest, Dynasty and Knots Landing in positions 22, 25 and 27 with 30, 27 and 26 shares respectively. See Electronic Media, 9 February 1987, p. 36. Of course, afternoon soap operas continue to dominate their time slots as they have for decades.

3. Muriel G. Cantor and Suzanne Pingree, The Soap Opera (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1983), pp. 47 - 57, 31 - 46. Anita Gilbert, All My Afternoons: The Heart and Soul of TV Soap Opera (New York: A & W, 1979), p. 14. Raymond W. Stedman, The Serials: Drama and Suspense by Installment (Norman: University of Oaklahoma Press, 1977), pp. 284 - 291. Christopher H. Sterling and John M. Kittross, Stay Tuned: A Concise History of American Broadcasting (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1978), pp. 165, 337.

4. A special "Soap Opera Symposium" issue of the Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media was recently published (1986) as was a similar special issue of the Journal of American Culture, 6, (1983). As recently as 1972, however, Natan Katzman was able to observe that "despite the magnitude of the phenomenon, there has been no published research on television serials."

Natan Katzman, "Television Soap Operas: What's Been Going On Anyway? ," Public Opinion Quarterly, 36 (1972): 200-12. In 1982, another report also noted that, "soap operas have not been the grist for study by social scientists. Only game shows have received less conce ptual and empirical attention as a unique area of commercial television programming." Bradley S. Greenberg, Kimberly Neuendorf, Nancy Buerkel-Rothfuss and Linda Henderson, "The Soaps: What's On and Who Cares?," Journal of Broadcasting, 26 (1982): 519-35.

5. Mary Cassata, Thomas Skill and S. Boadu, "In Sickness and in Health," Journal of Communication, 29 (1979): 73-80.

6. W. K. Garlington, "Drinking on Television: A Preliminary Study with Emphasis on Method," Journal of Studies on Alc ohol, 38 (1977): 2199-2205. Bradley S. Greenberg, "Smoking, Drugging and Drinking in Top Rated TV Series," Journal of Drug Education, 11 (1981): 227-34. S A. Lowery, "Soap and Booze in the Afternoon: An Analysis of Alcohol Use in Daytime Serials," Journal of Studies on Alcohol, 41 (1980): 829-38.

7. Oddly enough, very little research literature exists concerning television viewing in public places, such as college campus viewing rooms or bars. Yet, it is clear that a significant amount of TV viewing does occur outside of the home. In San Francisco, for example, a number of gay bars frequently draw large crowds for the weekly ritual of viewing "Die Nasty" (Dynasty). See Armistead Maupin, "Are ABC, Dynasty Copping Out On Gays?," Datebook-San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle 11 March 1984: 28.

George Mendenhall, "Gays in the Soaps," Bay Area Reporter 10 Nov. 1983: 28.

8. Edward J. Whetmore, American Electric (Unpublished manuscript, University of San Francisco, 1981), p. 247.

9. See, for example, T. Miyazaki, "Housewives and Daytime Serials in Japan: A Uses and Gratifications Perspective," Communication Research, 8 (1981): 323-41. For general examples of research in the area of "uses and gratifications" see J. M. McLeod, C. Bybee, and J. A. Durall, "Evaluating Media Performance by Gratifications Sought and Received," Journalism Quarterly, 59 (1982): 3-12, 59. P. Palmgreen and J. D. Rayburn, "Gratifications Sought and Media Exposure: An Expectancy Value Model," Communication Research, 9 (1982): 561-80. P. Palmgreen and J. D. Rayburn, "A Response to Stanford," Communication Research, 10 (1983): 253-7. P. Palmgreen, L. Wenner and J. D. Rayburn, "Relations Between Gratifications Sought and Obtained: A Study of Television News," Communication Research, 7 (1980): 161-92. S. W. Stanford, "Comment on Palmgreen and Rayburn, 'Gratifications Sought and Media Exposure'," Communication Research, 10 (1983): 247-51. L. Wenner, "Gratifications Sought and Obtained in Program Dependency: A Study of Network Evening News and 60 Minutes," Communication Research, 9 (1982): 539-60. The relatively recent emphasis on "gratifications sought vs. "gratifications obtained" represents a much-needed advance in the area of gratifications studies, as they attempt to integrate a sense of process into the analytical scheme. Ultimately, however, we have found much of this research to be yet another example of the "all

talk and little action" phenomenon so endemic to our field. That is, such research purports to study processual phenomena but uses methods that are static and inappropriate to studying natural human events. For a discussion of non-traditional, process-oriented research, see Michelle A. Wolf, "How Children Negotiate Television," in Natural Audiences: Qualitative Research of Media Uses and Effects. Ed. Thomas R. Lindlof. Norwood : Ablex, 1987. 58-94.

10. Ronald J. Compesi, "Gratifications of Daytime Serial Viewers," Journalism Quarterly, 57 (1980): 155-58.

11. Indeed, the "listings" of reasons for viewing particular television programs could be developed for any human activity. People often report that viewing is "entertaining" and that this entertainment is important for them. Yet, they might also find sex, eating, radio listening, letter writing or daydreaming "entertaining." In that sense, traditional uses and gratifications studies are too vague, too general to be of any explanatory use.

12. The preliminary results of this study are reported in Edward J. Whetmore and Alfred P. Kielwasser, "The Soap Opera Audience Speaks: A Preliminary Report," Journal of American Culture, 6.3 (1983): 110-6.

13. Michael E. Roloff, "Communication Strategies, Relationships and Relational Changes," in Explorations in Interpersonal Communication. Ed. Gerald R. Miller. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1976. 174.

14. Roloff, p. 182.

15. Whetmore and Kielwasser, 111-12.

16. Compare this observation to those made by Horace Newcomb,

TV: The Most Popular Art (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), pp. 161-82 and B. Rose, "Thickening the Plot," Journal of Communication, 29 (1979): 81-84.

17. Lee Thayer, "You Don't Need a Fence Post," in Nothing Never Happens. K. G. Johnson, J. J. Senator, M. C. Liebig and G. Minor. Beverly Hills, CA: Glencoe, 1974. 259-62. Thayer has adapted this formula from The Process and Effects of Mass Communication. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1954. p.19.

18. Thayer, p. 259.

19. This aspect of the genre is discussed as the "hump factor" in Whetmore and Kielwasser, pp. 110-11.

20. In fact, soap operas seem to be among the most frequently and regularly taped television programs, falling into the category of "perishable recordings," programs that are recorded for later viewing but not saved over any appreciable time period.

21. Whetmore and Kielwasser, p. 111.

22. See particularly the citations listed in note "9".

23. Steven Chaffee and Everett Rogers, "Communication as an Academic Discipline: A Dialogue," Journal of Communication, 33.3 (1983): 18-30.

24. National Institute of Mental Health, "Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the Eighties," in Mass Communication Review Yearbook Volume 4. Ed. E. Wartella, D. C. Whitney and S. Windhal. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1983. 23-35.

Table One

Key Factors in the Dramatic Serial Gratification Process

	Viewer Factors		Program Factors
Gratification Level	Relative Time Spent Viewing	Content Comprehension	Gratification Events
1	Low	Action	Immediate
2	Moderate	Causality (Interaction)	Immediate, Short-term and Compound[a]
3	High	Gestalt (Synchronic/ Diachronic)	Immediate, Short-term, Long-term and Compound

[a]Level 2 gratification compounds cannot and do not include long-term gratification events.